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ANTIQUITIES.

ART. I. *Remarks on the Book of Mac Firbis, an Irish Manuscript lately transcribed for the Academy. By GEORGE PETRIE, Esq., R.H.A., M.R.I.A.*

Read 27th February, 1837.

MORE than a year since I had the honor of suggesting to the Council of the Academy the importance of obtaining from its proprietor, Lord Roden, a loan of an Irish manuscript of great celebrity, in order that a transcript of it might be made for our library ; and this suggestion having been acted on, the manuscript was placed in our hands for this purpose by that distinguished nobleman, through the friendly medium of the Dean of Saint Patrick's. As the Council afterwards did me the honor to entrust to me the care of having this transcript made, I feel it my duty now, on its completion, to submit it to the Academy for their inspection, and to make a few remarks on its nature and contents, in order that the Academy may be enabled to judge not only of its value and importance as a historical record, as well as of the pains which have been taken by the persons employed to render it as perfect as possible, but also, that the Academy may feel satisfied that the funds which have been applied to this purpose have not been injudiciously expended. Another object which I propose to myself in offering these observations is, to obtain the sanction of the Academy for prefixing to the volume, previously to its being bound, a short record of the circumstances under which it was made ; and, as the transcript has received the addition of much important co-relative matter, not included in the original manuscript, that a notice may be added of the sources from which such additional matter has been obtained, and how it is distinguished in this transcript.

The original manuscript, which I also lay on the table, is, as will be seen, a small quarto on paper, containing 957 pages, all of which, with the exception of a few towards the end, are in the handwriting of the compiler, the celebrated Irish hereditary antiquary, Duard Mac Firbis; and the pages not written by him are in the handwriting of the no less celebrated antiquary Michael O'Clery, chief of the annalists, popularly called the Four Masters, of whose great work the autograph is in the library of the Academy. The contents of the volume may be described in general terms as historico-genealogical, being a history of the several colonies who established themselves by conquest in Ireland, with genealogies of the principal families who descend from them, carried down in many instances to the time of the compiler. The nature and extent of this collection will be best understood from the following abstract of its contents, which, however, for the sake of brevity, I am obliged to compress into a very narrow compass.

The writer commences with this title of the work, in the manner of Irish writers of his own time, as follows:—

“ The branches of relationship and genealogical ramifications of every colony that took possession of Ireland [*carried*] from this time up to Adam, (excepting only those of the Fomorians, Lochlons, and Sax-Galls, of whom we, however, treat, as they have settled in our country,) together with a sanctilogium and catalogue of the kings of Ireland; and finally, an index, which comprises, in alphabetical order, the surnames, and the remarkable placees mentioned in this book, which was compiled by Dubholtach Mac Firbis of Lecan, 1650.”*

The writer then proceeds to give the title of the work, after the manner of the old Irish authors, giving an account of the time, place, author, and object of the work, as follows:—

“ The place, time, author, and cause of writing this book, are:—the place, the college of St. Nicholas, in Galway; time, the time of the religious war between the Catholics of Ireland and the heretics of Ireland, Scotland, and England, particularly the year 1650; the person or author, Duard, the son of

* “ Craobha coibneara agur gneusta genealogh gacá ghabala vap gáb Eipe on amra go habam (aict Fomoraid Coelionaid agur Saxgall amam lamam o éangadap vap tteip) go naoimhreancúr agur neamhioighneach Fóbla pop. Agur pa ñeoig cláir na ecuimriúcheap (iap nupo aibisíore) na ríonnta agur na haité oifídearca luaitear ión leabharra do teaglomaó lefan Dubholtac mac Firbifig Leacan 1650.”

Giolla Iosa more Mac Firbis, historian, &c. of Lecan Mac Firbis in Tireragh on the Moy ; and the cause of writing the book is to increase the glory of God, and for the information of the community in general."

In the introduction which follows, and consists of 18 pages, the compiler argues ably in support of the authenticity of the ancient history and genealogies of the Irish, and of their claims to early civilization, particularly in literature and the architectural art. He gives, from ancient authorities, the names of the poets, law-givers, historians, harpers, and builders, who came with the early colonies, as well as of those writers most distinguished in subsequent times, of whom he states, that it would require a whole volume to mention only the names.

" With regard to our later writers," he adds, " who flourished within the last 600 years, here follow the names of some of them :—the *O'Mulconrys* were the hereditary Bards of Connaught, and some branches of them were Bards of Thomond, some of Leinster, and some of Annaly, (now Longford ;)—the *Clan-Firbis* were the hereditary Bards of Lower Connaught, (i. e. of the County of Sligo,) of Hy Fiachrach Moy, of Tir-Amalgaid, (Tirawly,) of Cera, of Hy Fiachrach Aidne, of Eachtga, and of the race of Colla Uais, that is, of the Clan Donnell ; the *O'Curnins* were the hereditary Poets of the O'Ruarks of Brefney, (now the County of Leitrim ;) the *O'Duigenans* were the Poets of the Mac Dermots, called Clan Malroney, and of Conmacne of Moy-Rein ; the *O'Du-vegans* in Hy-Maine, followed them ; the *O'Clerys* and the *O'Keenans* were the Poets and Historians of Tirconnell ; the *O'Luinins* were the Poets of Fermanagh ; the *O'Clercens*, of Tyrone ; the *O'Duinins*, of South Munster, that is of the descendants of Eogan More, namely, the Mac Carthys, the O'Sullivans, &c. ; the *Mac an Ghabhans*, of Ormond ; the *O'Riardans*, of Eile ; the *Clan Crutins* and *O'Brudins* in Thomond ; the *Mac Gilkellys*, in Western Connaught with the O'Flahertys, and so on.—Every district had its Bard and its Brehon, or Judge ; and the genealogies were so accurately entered in their books, that he who refuses credit to them, may equally deny faith in his father or grandfather, since our fathers and grandfathers were our witnesses, each generation committing them to the care of their successors.

" Neither was there any order, lay, or ecclesiastic, in Ireland, which was not bound by penalties, as stated in our *Law books*, and on pain also of loss of honor and reputation, to preserve their genealogies and histories, so that on comparison

with those of other districts and churches, they should be found to correspond ; and it was ordained by law that there should be always seven ranks or orders of the learned to inspect those books, namely, 1, the *Ollamhs* ; 2, the *Anrads* ; 3, the *Cli* ; 4, the *Cana* ; 5, the *Dos* ; 6, the *Mac-Fuirmid* ; 7, the *Fochlag*. The order of *Fileas* were, by law, to be of free families, and of spotless integrity with respect to theft, murder, extortion, adultery, &c.

“ The Irish historians, not content with recording the history and customs of the nobility, have also written concerning the physicians and tradesmen of old times, and hence we know who the builders were of our first *Raths* and *Duns*, from the poems of the ancients ; and if those ancient buildings have disappeared, be it remembered how many fine castles have been levelled to the ground and disappeared in our own memories, or fallen of themselves from neglect. I myself have, within the last sixteen years, seen high and strong castles of lime and stone, and now nothing remains but the moats of earth to indicate where they stood ; and need we wonder if strong places which were built 2000 years, after the manner of eastern nations, such as Spain, &c. whence colonies came into Ireland, have disappeared also ?—Nor have they entirely disappeared either, for there are still remaining royal and extensive *Raths* in all parts of Ireland, in which are many chipped and smooth stones, and subterranean crypts or chambers, as at *Rath Maoilcatha* at Castle Conor, and at *Ballydowd* in Tireragh, on the banks of the Moy. There are nine subterranean chambers formed of smooth stones within that ancient *Rath*. I was within this *Rath*, and deem it one of the oldest in Ireland.”

He says that the history which he gives was written in books from time to time, from the deluge, by elders and persons vouchsafed by God, down to the time of Saints Patrick, Columb, Comgall, Finen, &c., who wrote after them, and handed the accounts down to succeeding ecclesiastical and other writers, so that it is to be found on holy altars, in libraries, in the hands of seniors, doctors, and historians at this day, and will for ever.

He then adds, that the work is divided into nine books. The first treats of the arrival of the colony of Partholan, about 300 years after the flood ; the second, of the arrival of the Nemedians ; the third, of the conquest of Ireland by the Firbolg, or Belgæ ; the fourth, of the Tuatha De-Dananns ; the fifth, of the Gaels, or Milesians ; the sixth, of the race of Ir and Dal Fiachach ; the seventh,

of the race of Ebhir, and of the saints descended from Lughaidh, the son of Ith, who possessed one division of Munster ; the eighth, of the saints of Ireland ; and the ninth and last, of the Fomoraigh, or sea-robbers from Africa, the Danes and the Saxons, or Anglo-Normans.

The first and second of these books, as Dr. O'Conor remarks, (*Bibl. MS. Stow.* vol. i. p. 141,) are fabulous and brief: they end at page 37. The pedigree of the Campbells, or Mac Allens, of Scotland follows, and is particularly valuable, not only as an unpublished historical record of that great clan, but also as preserving the Irish historic tradition, that they were not of the Scotic, but of the Belgic race.

The third book, which contains the history of the Firbolgs, commences at page 47, and ends at page 74. This book contains a list of the territories named from this colony, and of the tribes anciently located in them. This book is characterized by Dr. O'Conor as the best account of the Irish Belgæ extant, (*ubi supra,*) and called forth the following observation from his grandfather, the venerable Charles O'Conor of Belanagare. “ It is particularly valuable by rescuing from oblivion the names of districts and tribes in Ireland antecedently to the second century; since which the Scots have gradually imposed new names of their own, as they were enabled from time to time to expel the old Belgic inhabitants. It is a most curious chart of ancient topography, and vastly preferable to that given by the Alexandrian geographer, Ptolemy, who must have known but little of Ireland, wherein the Romans never made a descent.” (*Pref. to Ogygia Vindicated*, p. ix.)

This book also contains at page 49 a list of the battles fought by Tuathal against the Attacots; and at page 54 an ancient historical poem of 164 verses, reciting the leading features of the history of the Belgæ.

The fourth book, which begins at page 75, and contains the history of the Tuatha De-Dananns, gives the names of their territorial divisions, with lists and genealogies of their kings and other distinguished persons. This occupies 9 pages, and ends at page 84.

The fifth and succeeding books, with the exception of the last, are devoted to the history and genealogies of the Milesians, and commences at page 84. The pedigrees commence at page 114, with the northern tribes of the Kinel Owen—the O'Neills, Mac Loughlins, O'Kanes, O'Gormleys, &c. &c.; these terminate at

page 150. The pedigrees of the Kinel Connell, or families of Donegal, follow, as O'Donnells, O'Boyles, O'Doghertys, &c. ; and at page 159 there is a list of the chiefs of Tirconnell down to the year 1600.

Page 161,—Next follow the genealogies of the Clan Colman, of whom the O'Melaghlin, kings of Meath, were the most distinguished family.

Page 163,—Next follow the genealogies of the posterity of Hugh Slaney, from whom the O'Kellys and other families of Bregia descend. Next, of the posterity of Carbry, the son of Niall. Next, of the posterity of Fiacha, the son of Niall,—the Macgeoghegans, Molloys, &c. Next, of the posterity of Maine,—the Foxes, Magawleys, O'Breens, &c.

Page 212,—The families of Connaught descended from Muireadhach Muileahan,—the O'Conors, Mac Dermotts, Mac Donoghs, O'Malroneys, &c. Then follow the names, order of succession, and chronology of the Christian kings of Connaught, taken from an ancient poem.

Page 261,—The genealogies of the families of Tireragh on the Moy, the Mac Firbises, O'Dowds, &c. ; with an account of their territories.

Page 270,—Genealogies of the families of Ceara, in Mayo.

Page 272,—Genealogies of the families of Tirawley, in the same county.

Page 277,—A poem of 892 verses, by Giolla Iosa more Mac Firbis, enumerating the families of Tireragh and Tirawley and their inheritances.

Page 299,—The history and genealogies of the families of Oriel,—Maguires, Mac Mahons, &c.

Page 320,—The history and genealogies of the families of Hy-Maine in Connaught,—the O'Kellys, &c.

Page 330,—An ancient poem of 160 verses, by Giolla na naomh O'Dunn, on the genealogies of the families of Oriel, a district embracing the present counties of Louth, Armagh, and Monaghan.

Page 334,—The history and genealogies of the Heremonians, in the southern half of Ireland.

Page 400,—The history and genealogies of the Dalriads, or Irish colony, in Scotland, drawn from Irish and Scotch authorities.

Page 408,—The genealogies of the kings of Scotland.

Page 414,—An ancient poem of 108 verses, detailing the succession of the kings of Scotland down to Malcolm, the son of Donogh, in whose time the poem

was written. This is the celebrated poem so essential to Scottish history, which has been published from this very copy by Pinkerton and by O'Conor; and no other ancient copy is now known to exist, nor could any other be found in the time of O'Flaherty, more than a century since.

Page 418.—An account of the settlement of the Picts in Scotland, and of the wars of the Picts and Scots with the Romans. This tract, which is written in Latin, and occupies five pages, is a very valuable document, and, I believe, as yet unpublished.

To this is appended, in our transcript, fourteen pages of very interesting matter not found in the original work, but copied from an insertion by Mac Firbis himself in an abstract of it written in 1666. It gives an account of the first establishment of the claims of the Milesians to the Scottish sovereignty, and of the succession of the Stewarts, their genealogy, intermarriages, &c.; with a collection of some Irish and Scottish surnames.

Page 426.—A list of the Christian kings of Leinster, from an ancient poem.

Page 430.—The history and genealogies of the Lagenian families, descended from Leary, the son of Hugony the Great.

Page 461.—Genealogies of the descendants of the monarch Cathaoir more.

Page 472.—Ancient and modern compilations of the genealogies of the Leinster families, as the Mac Murroghs or Cavanaghs, O'Byrnes, O'Tooles, Fitz Patricks, &c.

Page 485.—The history and genealogies of the families descended from Ir, son of Milesius,—the ancient Ultonians.

Page 491.—A short metrical and prose extract from the book of Sabhall Phadraig, (now Saul, county of Down,) treating of the Ulidians.

Page 493.—An account of the families of the Ulidians, called Dal Fiatach, taken from the book of Saul.

Page 505.—An account of the poets of Ireland and Scotland.

Page 514.—An account of the Dalaradians.

Page 535.—An account of the descendants of Fergus Mac Roigh.

Page 556.—The history and genealogies of the families of Leix.

Page 561.—Genealogies of the Ultonians, from the book of Saul, Psalter of Cashel, Book of Lecan, &c.

Page 564,—Genealogies of the families of Leix,—the O'Mores, O'Kellys, O'Dowlings, O'Lawlers, O'Dorans, &c.

Page 589,—An ancient poem of 320 verses, on the Irian kings of Ulster.

Page 599,—History and genealogies of the Momonians.

Page 658,—A quotation of 72 verses, from O'Dugan's topographical poem, respecting the Delvins.

Page 665,—Genealogies, &c. of the families of Gallen and Leyney,—the O'Haras, O'Garas, &c.

Page 688,—A list of the kings of Munster, down to Donnell O'Brien, in the twelfth century.

Page 692,—History of Irish saints.

Page 696,—Pedigrees of Irish saints.

Page 754,—The chronology of the kings of Ireland, compiled from the Annals of the Four Masters, which Mac Firbis calls the Book of Fergal O'Gara.

Page 768,—The history of the Fomorians and Danes.

Page 780,—The history and pedigrees of the Anglo-Normans.

Page 781,—A list of the names of the Normans who came over with William the Conqueror to England.

Page 786,—The history and genealogies of the English families in Ireland, viz. first the Geraldines, concerning whom two anonymous poems are given, the first consisting of 148, and the second, which was written in 1601, of 248 verses: these poems commence at page 789, and end at 798. These poems are followed by genealogies of the families of Burke, Butler, Birmingham, Gibbon, Scott, Barry, Roche, Purcell, Nugent, Costeloe, Philips, Jordan, Cumming, Walsh, Barrett, Mac Quillan, Joice, Dillon, Tyrell, Barnwall, Tuite, Darcy, Petit, Cusack, Brown, Prendergast, Tobin, Dalton, &c. &c.

Page 839,—The history of the family of Walsh, translated from the book of Laurence Walsh, written in 1588.

After page 840, ten pages have been inserted from the abstract of 1666, already referred to, eight of which are devoted to a more detailed account of the family of Nugent than that given in the original work, and the other two, of the family of Darcy.

Page 845,—A list of the chief governors of Ireland, from Earl Strongbow to Sir John Perrot, in 1584.

Page 854,—A general index to the work, giving the proper names of men and places, excepting the saints and their churches.

Page 926,—An index to that part of the work treating of the Irish saints.

Page 935,—The topographical poem of O'Dugan, on the Northern Division of Ireland.

Page 948,—The topographical poem of O'Huidhrin on the Southern Division of Ireland. This poem, which is in the handwriting of Michael O'Clery, ends the volume at page 957.

Such are the principal contents of this valuable manuscript, which, it will be seen, contains much important historical matter not to be found elsewhere, and which it was of great importance should be deposited in some public library, easy of access to those who could turn it to useful account, as well as that the chance of its loss, while dependent on a single copy, should be diminished, by the existence of a faithful transcript. Of its value the Academy will form some idea from the following observations, made by one in the highest degree qualified to form a just estimate—I allude to the venerable Charles O'Conor of Belanagare, who writes as follows in his preface to *Ogygia Vindicated*, p. xx. “Ptolomey could know but little of Ireland in the second century; his defects, however, have been supplied in the Lecan records, as copied by the late celebrated Mac Firbis. In that copy (now in the hands of the Earl of Roden,) we have an account of the several tribes of Ireland in the beginning of the second century. It throws additional light on the history of that and some subsequent ages, and is undoubtedly the most ancient document of Celtic topography hitherto discovered.”

That the transcript now finished is not inferior in penmanship to the original manuscript, will be obvious to every one who inspects it. But I have the pleasure of adding, that it is superior in many more important respects. The original has suffered much injury from its margins having been cut down by a modern binder, and a considerable portion of its contents has been wholly obliterated by stains. The losses thus sustained have nearly all been supplied from two abstracts of the work now, through the favor of their proprietors, in my hands. The first of these was written in 1726, by James Maguire of Slieve-da-Con, in the county of Fermanagh; and the second is a transcript from an abstract of the original work, with considerable additions, made by Mac Firbis himself in 1666. And

here it may not be improper to state, that the existence of this amended abstract was unknown to Charles O'Conor of Belanagare, the best informed Irish scholar of the last century, though he was aware of Mac Firbis's intention of writing it, as he thus states, in speaking of the original work, in his preface to *Ogygia Vindicated*, p. ix. "Of that work Mac Firbis intended a second draught, (as he intimates,) with amendments and corrections, but whether he executed his design we cannot learn." In this abstract the compiler re-wrote many introductory passages, corrected many errors, continued the pedigrees in many instances down to that period, and added many collateral names not included in the original work. In our transcript all these improvements, corrections, and additions have been carefully inserted from both works; and that they should not be confounded with the text of the original, they are all distinguished by marginal references to the works from which they have been taken. In like manner it has been deemed proper to distinguish several marginal observations which occur in the original, and which were written by Charles O'Conor.

The transcript has been made by Mr. Eugene Curry, a person in every way qualified to do justice to the undertaking, whether as an Irish scholar, or a faithful scribe; and the labour and zeal which he has devoted to the work, are deserving of the highest praise. With a transcript from his hands we must have felt satisfied; but that no doubt whatever should exist of its perfection, the critical skill of another Irish scholar of the highest distinction has been called into exercise, and applied with an equal degree of patient ardour,—I need scarcely say that I allude to Mr. J. O'Donovan, by whom the whole work, word for word, and letter for letter, has been most carefully compared with the original.

In connexion with a notice of a work so important, it would not be improper to add some biographical account of its author; unfortunately, however, but few materials now exist to enable me to give such a sketch as would be satisfactory, or as the subject deserves.

Of his private history, all that is known may be told in a few words. He was a native of Lecan, in the county of Sligo, called Lecan Mac Firbis, from his ancestors, who, from the earliest times, were hereditary historians and antiquaries of the lower Connaught. It is to them that we owe the valuable manuscript volume called the *Book of Lecan*, which was compiled in the 14th century, and which is now one of the distinguished boasts of our library.

In the calamities of the civil wars of 1641 this family lost their hereditary possessions ; but the ruins of their castle, bearing their name, still survive, and give melancholy interest to a dreary landscape.

The year of his birth is not recorded, but it is known that, in order to perfect his education as an antiquary, he was placed at an early age under the tuition of the Mac Egans, hereditary Brehons or judges in Ormond, from whom he acquired a profound knowledge of the Brehon laws. In subsequent years he employed himself in several works which he considered essential to the preservation of Irish literature ; and after the loss of his hereditary property he was employed as a translator and assistant by the celebrated Sir James Ware. Some of the translations made for the latter are to be found in the library of the British Museum. To these meagre facts I can only add that of his death, which, as we learn from Charles O'Conor, was tragical,—for this last of the Mac Firbises was unfortunately murdered at Dunflin in the county of Sligo in the year 1670. The circumstances connected with this event were known to that gentleman, but a proper respect for the feelings of the descendants of the murderer, who was a gentleman of the country, prevented him from detailing them. They are, however, still remembered in the district in which it occurred, but I will not depart from the example set me, by exposing them to public light.

Of the other works of Mac Firbis, the only satisfactory knowledge which we possess is derived from himself. He states, in the preface to the work now before us, that he had written a dictionary of the Brehon laws, in which he had explained them extensively ; and also a catalogue of the manuscripts and writers of ancient Ireland. Neither of these works has as yet been discovered. But there is some reason to believe that the former at least may still exist, as an Irish scholar, O'Flanagan, quoted from it about twenty years since. The discovery of this work, which Charles O'Conor has characterized as "the great desideratum of the present age," would be of the highest importance, as its loss would be an irreparable injury to Irish literature. In conclusion, I have only to add a congratulation to the Academy on their acquisition of so important an addition to their manuscript library, and on their having, by their liberality, rendered available to the public this valuable remain of the last hereditary antiquary of Ireland.